"We have important intelligence. The Germans will try to cross the river here."

It was exactly the place Boldyrev had indicated to me some ten days before. It was held on our side by General Dorfman's 186th Division, which belonged to the 43rd Corps. The division was one of the best in the army. During preceding weeks, considerable reserves had been concentrated at its rear. Parsky explained our plan of defense:

"The Germans, with their superiority in guns, can silence our front batteries and pulverize the first line of field fortifications. We have no way to keep them from crossing the river, but on this bank they will be surrounded by our forces. Their advance will reduce their advantage in artillery. The first task of our troops is to oppose the crossing, so as to gain time for us to gather strength for the second phase of the operation. Then we must annihilate the enemy or throw him back before he moves his batteries forward." He asked me to go straight to the 186th Division to help its commander and the regimental committees prepare the troops for the impending battle.

In the division, everything seemed to be in good shape. Positions had been reinforced and blockhouses covered with fresh sod. The men were exhilarated, as on the eve of an important event. On the way back I stopped at the headquarters of the 43rd Corps. Boldyrev was bristling with confidence in his troops but less sure of his fresh reserves, especially the Lettish battalions. I drove to the Tirailleurs and phoned from there to the General that he had nothing to fear from that side.

In the afternoon an Alsatian who had crawled over to our lookouts reported the attack was to start at dawn. An order was sent to the 186th Division to keep the men in the blockhouses and get the masks ready for a gas attack. I wanted to drive back to the trenches, but Posochov, the army's Chief of Staff, advised me not to risk night driving without lights. Moreover, the Iskosol called me to a meeting about last-minute instructions to the regiments.

Early the next morning a call came from army headquarters: The Germans have started the attack; communication has been broken; no news from the 186th. Parsky came to the phone. He did not ask me to go to the front but said calmly, "Communication is always our weak point. If you go to the troops, please keep in touch with me. Each time communication is restored, even for a short spell, call me up. And may the Lord protect you!"

I am ashamed to recall that I had left Emma with a vague explanation that I had been called to the front for some routine matter.

The headquarters chauffeur knew all the roads and drove like mad.